

Vitaloid: Base ZERO

by Tyler Magruder

Text is released under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike International (CC BY-SA 4.0) license

The last space outlaws are in captivity. The galaxy is at peace.

Obviously that didn't last. A secret council of evil masterminds organized a prison break and executed it flawlessly. During the escape, the outlaws discovered a research facility containing a newly discovered species called Vitaloids. Realizing their potential for destruction, the outlaws stole the creatures and made their getaway. Far from the reaches of their captors, the outlaws settled on a distant planet and set nefarious plans in motion to build an impenetrable fortress where they research evil science that will aid in their future conquest of the galaxy.

With the outlaws outside of their jurisdiction, the space authorities seek the aid of the Bounty Hunter who has a score to settle with the outlaws.

Vitaloid: Base Zero is a journaling game about the hubris of evil space scientists and their quick destruction at the hands of a competent and vengeful Bounty Hunter. This game takes major inspiration from the Metroid video game franchise (especially Metroid: Zero Mission and Super Metroid), as well as The Quiet Year by Avery Alder. You need a standard deck of playing cards and something to write on to play this game.

Quick Summary

This game takes place over two phases. For the first phase of the game, you chronicle the development of the space outlaw base and flesh out the villains inhabiting the base. You draw cards to determine the prompt for the next part of the base to detail, and then use your imagination to fill in the details. This continues until you draw a certain card, which heralds the arrival of the Bounty Hunter. When this happens you put away all cards that haven't been drawn yet, and shuffle all the played cards into a new deck. For the second phase of the game, you chronicle the Bounty Hunter's rampage through the base and detail how she dismantles the defenses you created and uses them to grow stronger. Ultimately she will vanquish the four Bosses of the base and then take on the facility's Brain. With the Brain defeated, the facility self-destructs and the Bounty Hunter escapes. Are the space outlaws truly defeated for good, and is this the last we will see of the Vitaloids? Probably not.

Content Warnings

This game is almost entirely up to your interpretation of the cards, so I can't account for every way that the cards may be interpreted, but the cards hint at general violence,

violence against animals, experiments on animals and people, environmental exploitation, body horror, and eugenics.

Vitaloids

Vitaloids are a species of creatures of an unknown origin, seemingly created to be the most efficient killing machines in the galaxy. The Vitaloids in the possession of the space outlaws are young and possess numerous weaknesses, but with time they will grow to be nearly unstoppable, so destroying them now is of utmost importance to the safety of the galaxy. The rest is up to your imagination.

The Bounty Hunter

The Bounty Hunter is the hero of this story, a fearsome but inexperienced warrior with a vendetta against the space outlaws. This is her first solo mission, where she intends to prove herself and take down the space outlaws for good. While she's not present in the first phase of the game, it's a good idea to start thinking about her and her abilities. Think like a video game designer. You can include her abilities in your regular notes, but I've provided a sheet in the game downloads for you to lay out your Bounty Hunter's abilities in the style of a certain video game franchise. Fill in one or two boxes on the sheet, and then as you progress through phase 2 of the game, fill in more boxes to show the Bounty Hunter gaining more abilities and growing more powerful. In the space between the boxes, draw your Bounty Hunter if you think that would be fun.

Setting Up the Game

Start the game with a deck of cards and a piece of paper you can write on. Remove the face cards (Jacks, Queens, and Kings) and Jokers from the deck and set them aside for later. Add the Queen cards back to the deck, based on how long of a game you want to play. Add one Queen if you want the game to last as long as possible, or add all four Queens if you want the game to be short. Because of randomness, you might get a short game even if you only include one Queen, or a long game if you include all four. If you want to avoid randomness in the game's length, leave out all Queen cards from the deck and decide for yourself when you think you're ready to move on to the next phase of the game.

Phase 1, Part 1

The game begins with you figuring out the details of the space outlaws and their base. You won't draw any cards yet, instead laying the foundations that will help color your card draws later. If you want, give the faction of space outlaws a name. Name the planet the base is on, and write a short description of the planet. Use some of these descriptors as inspiration, or come up with something completely unique:

ancient, barren, cavernous, cratered, dying, fractured, frozen, haunted, infested, jagged, marshy, ruined, submerged, unstable, volcanic

Next you'll establish the major players of the space outlaws. The mastermind behind the organization is called the Brain, and the four other powerful leaders are called Bosses. The Brain is represented by a Joker card, and the Bosses are represented by the King cards. Though they won't get drawn in Phase 1, it's important to establish who they are, because they will influence the locations around their lairs. Use some of these descriptors as inspiration, or come up with something completely unique:

amphibian, angel, bear, cyborg, cyclops, demon, dinosaur, dragon, eel, fish, ghost, giant, hawk, insect, jet, owl, reptile, robot, shark, skeleton, spider, squid, tank, tiger, whale, wolf

Assign each Boss to a suit. Each card drawn from that suit will correspond with something in that Boss' lair. With these details in place, you're ready to begin drawing cards. Feel free to come up with more details before moving on, but you can also come back and add or change details at any point in the future.

Phase 1, Part 2

Shuffle the deck if you haven't already, and then draw a card. Each card has an associated prompt related to the space outlaw base. Write down the card, and then write your answer to the prompt, filling in as many details as you want. Place the card in the discard pile when you are done. Continue drawing until you draw a Queen card. Answer that prompt, and then begin Phase 2. Do not put the Queen card in the discard pile.

Diamonds

Ace: an unstable power source needs to be contained. Where does the excess energy go?

Two: a natural landmark separates two parts of the base. What is it, and what was built to cross it?

Three: a powerful native creature once resisted the space outlaw occupation. How did they coerce it into defending their base?

Four: a massive quarry that once held bountiful resources is now almost completely depleted. What useful materials did the space outlaws find here?

Five: a maintenance workshop allows the space outlaws to keep the surrounding base operational. What makes the mechanics more dangerous than the typical space outlaw?

Six: a giant machine refines raw materials into valuable weapon components. What workplace safety violations make this an extremely dangerous machine to be near?

Seven: dangerous material waste is disposed of carelessly. What makes its home amidst the waste?

Eight: a landed space vessel delivers stolen goods for the space outlaw cause. What plundered treasures would make a pirate envious?

Nine: overcharged batteries store tremendous power that is distributed throughout the base. What serious defenses have the space outlaws employed to keep them safe?

Ten: an industrial robot is enhanced with dangerous defensive systems. What is its most powerful attack?

Queen: the Bounty Hunter arrives in the middle of a group of space outlaw guards. Do they fight to the bitter end or let her pass to spare their lives?

Clubs

Ace: cruel experiments turned a naturally peaceful creature into a destructive monster. What corners did the space outlaws cut in containing it?

Two: the space outlaws conduct fruitless experiments amongst their own. What survivor was the most unfortunate?

Three: harmless creatures await their turn to be experimented on. What secret do they keep about the nature of this planet?

Four: a mutant creature undergoes an unstable metamorphosis. What emerges from its cocoon?

Five: the space outlaws modify creatures to produce enough food to supply the entire base. What is the grossest aspect of the food?

Six: a containment facility stores a dangerous and potent mutagenic material. How has it harmed the workers at the facility?

Seven: an experiment fusing creature and machinery goes awry, and the augmented creature escapes. Where does it hide?

Eight: a creature is too dangerous for even the space outlaws to risk experimenting on it. How do they keep it restrained or docile?

Nine: a secret observation room allows space outlaw scientists to observe their experiments from safety. What finding has their attention?

Ten: the victim of the first successful space outlaw experiment serves its tormentors loyally. What is its sole memory of its past life?

Queen: the Bounty Hunter arrives in an isolated location. What helps mask her initial approach?

Hearts

Ace: a disturbed nest halts all work in this location. What's stopping the space outlaws from clearing the area?

Two: a natural obstacle makes traversing this location difficult. What did the space outlaws invent to ease their travels?

Three: space outlaw machinery mars what was once a beautiful vista. Where is the clash between machine and nature most profound?

Four: a stretch of land goes untouched by the space outlaws. How does leaving it alone work in the outlaws' favor?

Five: the space outlaws abandon an infrastructural tunnel after they build a more efficient transportation system. What takes their place as the inhabitants of the tunnel?

Six: a construction project collapses from poor planning and the hostile environment. What is being built to replace the collapse?

Seven: a constructed barrier separates two locations in the base, making travel between the locations difficult without space outlaw credentials. What is the barrier's weakness?

Eight: a natural hazard is integrated into a portion of the base, making it perilous to traverse without special knowledge or equipment. What trait of the space outlaws does the hazard reflect?

Nine: a pristine wilderness is rebuilt into a combat training facility. Who or what is most unhappy about these changes?

Ten: a terraforming machine prepares to make the surrounding landscape more tolerable for the space outlaws. What changes do the space outlaws plan?

Queen: the Bounty Hunter arrives through a secret entrance. How did she discover the way in?

Spades

Ace: the space outlaws develop a special unit that is completely immune to one of the Bounty Hunter's weapons. What new vulnerability is exposed thanks to this new protection?

Two: tight corridors make traversal through this location easy, but almost impossible to travel stealthily. What overlooked feature makes it possible to get through here unseen?

Three: advanced autonomous defenses patrol an isolated corridor. What secret are they protecting?

Four: a barracks houses countless space outlaws in uncomfortable, cramped spaces. What small comforts do the barracks provide?

Five: an unassuming corridor contains a deadly trap. How does it distinguish between intruders and space outlaws?

Six: outdated war machines protect low-priority zones where newer creations have yet to be deployed. What weaknesses do the older models share with the newer ones?

Seven: the space outlaws amass a fleet of combat vessels in preparation for their galactic conquest. Why are they kept grounded?

Eight: an attempt to replicate one of the Bounty Hunter's abilities fails catastrophically. What went wrong?

Nine: a mechanical guardian protects a research and development laboratory. What new technology is implemented in its defenses?

Ten: a squad of four heavily-armed space outlaws receive special training from the four Bosses. What unique powers do they have?

Queen: the Bounty Hunter arrives late after a rough landing. Draw two more cards before continuing to Phase 2.

Phase 2, Part 1

Once you draw a Queen card, the Bounty Hunter arrives to dismantle the space outlaw base. Set your original deck aside and shuffle all of the cards from the discard pile and your four King cards into a new deck. Draw a card from this new deck. If the card is not a face card, describe how the Bounty Hunter dismantles the space outlaws' operations in the corresponding area you described in Phase 1, and optionally describe how doing this makes her stronger. If the card is a King card, describe the Bounty Hunter's showdown with the corresponding Boss. It should be a fierce battle, but the Bounty Hunter will ultimately triumph, and take something from the fight that makes her stronger. Keep track of which King cards have been drawn. When all King cards have been drawn, begin Part 2.

Phase 2, Part 2

With all the Bosses defeated, the space outlaws resort to desperate measures and release the Vitaloids into the base before they're ready. Take the four Jack cards and shuffle them into the remaining deck. Continue playing as in Part 1, but when you draw a Jack card the Bounty Hunter clashes with and destroys one or more Vitaloid. Vitaloids are among the most dangerous creatures in the galaxy, but in their immature state they have weaknesses that the Bounty Hunter can exploit to achieve victory. When all Jack cards have been drawn and all Vitaloids destroyed, the path to the Brain's lair is open. Shuffle a single Joker card into the remaining deck. Continue playing as usual, but emphasize the increasing danger and oppressiveness as the Bounty Hunter nears the Brain's lair. When the Joker is drawn, the Bounty Hunter has her climactic encounter with the Brain. In the Brain's dying moments, they activate the base's self-destruct, just barely leaving enough time for the Bounty Hunter to escape with her life. Draw four more cards, or as many cards are remaining in the deck if there are less than four, describing the Bounty Hunter's desperate scramble to escape through the associated locations and get back to her ship. After the fourth draw, the Bounty Hunter escapes, and the base explodes, obliterating all remaining life inside and devastating its surroundings. Mission Complete!

What Now?

Congratulations! You finished the game! But that doesn't mean you have to be done with the game. Take all the time you want to think about what happened in the game, what you liked and disliked, what you might have done differently if you had more control over the card draws, and anything else you'd like. Also feel free to return to previous phases of the game and elaborate on any of the descriptions you created, either to create more coherence with what came after or to just fill in more details that you came up with after the fact. Finally, think about what comes next. What comes next

for the Bounty Hunter and the space outlaws? Maybe play another game to explore the future, or even write your own game!